

Rougon-Macquart" But when all is said "La Terre" remains one of his strongest and most truthful "books.¹

The savage brutishness of the chief characters in the work may well seem impossible to the ignorant; but although in reading "La Terre" one should always bear in mind that Zola never pretended that all peasants were like those in his grim picture, it is certain that Ms personages, individually, are accurately drawn. Awful is the record of parricides, matricides, fratricides, common murders, murderous assaults, rapes, and offences of inferior degree perpetrated in rural Prance. And earth hunger, disputes about property, "boundaries, inheritances, and so forth, will he found at the bottom of the great majority of cases. But "La Terre" does not deal exclusively with the criminal side of peasant life. It pictures many other features: it describes the drawbacks of the small-holdings system, shows agriculture hampered by the extreme subdivision of the soil, traces the march of revolutionary and socialist principles among those who till it; sketching, too, on the way, the treatment which the imperial *regime* accorded to the peasantry.

There is not space here to pass all the Bougon-Macquart volumes in review from a critical point of view. One may say, however, that generally, though not invariably, those dealing with a multiplicity of characters are superior to

those in which Zola analyses the feelings and actions of a few. It is acknowledged he excelled in portraying the

i A writer in the " Athenaeum" [No. 3911, October 11, 1902], when renewing Miss Betham-Edwards's " East of Paris," pointed out that in a previous work, " Prance of To-day" 1892, she had denounced "La Terre," and declared it to be "crushingly refuted" ; whereas ten years later she admitted that it was " not without foundation on fact/"